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### AAST 250.50: Human Rights and Mass Incarceration

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# Human Rights and Mass Incarceration

AAST 250-50  
(Online Course)

University of Montana  
African American Studies Program  
Fall 2021

Instructor: Alhaji Conteh, Ph.D.  
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Office Hours: By appointment

## Learning Contract

This syllabus represents a contract between the professor and student. Your enrollment in the course symbolizes your acceptance of the terms set forth. As your professor I reserve the right to amend the syllabus throughout the semester. **I will notify students of any significant changes to readings and/or lectures. Assignments and due dates will not be changed without notifying the class.**

## Course Description

Welcome to the Human Rights and Mass Incarceration online course offered by the African American Studies Program at the University of Montana. In this course we will examine the historical development of prisons and policing in the United States and how these two mechanisms have been used as a form of social control, specifically against people of African descent. The course will explore themes such as convict leasing, the war on drugs, the prison-industrial complex, political prisoners in the United States and the school-to-prison pipeline among other vital issues. The course will also examine some of the human rights violations related to mass incarceration raised by organizers, scholars, lawyers and the currently and formerly incarcerated. By the end of the semester, students will become familiar with important concepts and terms and will have a fundamental understanding of the history of prisons and police in the United States.

## Required Book List

Davis, Angela. *Are Prisons Obsolete?* New York, NY: Seven Stories Press, 2003. **(Available on Moodle on Introduction Page)**

Kilgore, James. *Understanding Mass Incarceration: A People's Guide to the Key Civil Rights Struggle of Our Time.* New York, NY: The New Press, 2015.

Taylor, Keeanga-Yamahtta. *From #BlackLivesMatter to Black Liberation.* Chicago, Ill: Haymarket Books, 2016.

**All other required readings will be available on Moodle.**

### **Student Expectations**

**Response Papers (5)**- Beginning in week four students will be required to submit five 1-2 page response papers over the course of the semester. The response papers will summarize and analyze the readings, lectures and topics from the previous two weeks. Each response paper will be worth two points. All response papers will be due on Monday during weeks 4, 6, 8, 12 and 14.

**Discussion Board Responses (5)**- To help facilitate discussion among students, there will be five discussion boards posted throughout the semester. The prompt for the discussion board will either be a question or a brief video or article related to a current event. Students are expected to respond in a thoughtful manner, and responses should be between 3-5 sentences in length. Students are also required to respond to **two** other students for full credit. Each discussion board response will be worth two points. Discussion boards will be posted and active from Monday to Saturday during weeks 3, 5, 7, 9 and 11.

**Quizzes (2)**- There will be two quizzes given throughout the semester in class. The quizzes will be worth ten points each and no make-up quizzes will be given. Each quiz will consist of multiple choice, short answer, fill in the blank and true/false questions from the readings, lectures, films and discussions. All quizzes will be posted on Thursdays at 8 am and will be available until Saturday at 11:59 pm. Once you begin the quiz, you will have 20 minutes to complete it.

**Exams (2)**- The two exams will consist of multiple choice, fill-in-the-blank, true/false, short answer and short essay questions which will be pulled from the readings, lectures, films and discussions. Each exam will be worth twenty points. All exams will be posted on Thursdays at 8 am and will be available until Saturday at 11:59 pm. Once you begin the exam, you will have 60 minutes to complete it.

**Final Project**- For the final project, you will choose a topic related to the topic of mass incarceration. You can work by yourself or in a group of 2-3. Be sure to choose a topic that you find interesting. The final project will be worth 20% of your final grade. The final project will be due on the day of the final. A 1-2 page proposal for your final project is due **Monday, September 27 by 11:59 PM.**

#### *Final Project*

There are multiple forms that your final project can take:

- Podcast/Audio Documentary (20-30 Minutes)
- Short film (15-20 Minutes)
- 5-7 Page Analytical Paper
- An Informational Website/Online Magazine
- Significant Art Project (**Must Be Approved**)
- Other Project (**Must Be Approved**)

**ALL** projects must be approved and you must incorporate at least ***five academic sources*** into your work.

A 1-2 page proposal for your final project is due **Monday, September 27 by 11:59 PM**. This proposal should include:

- A short summary of the proposed project.
- An outline of the content you plan to include.
- A list of at least ***five academic sources*** you plan to use (Books, Journal Articles, Reports, etc.)
- A timeline for completing the project
- A description of what attributes you believe the completed project should have in order to earn an A grade.

***\*\*\*The Final Project will be due on the day of the final\*\*\*(TBA)***

## **Grades**

Response Papers (5)- 10%

Discussion Board Responses (5)- 10%

Quizzes (2)- 20%

Exams (2)- 40%

Final Project- 20%

**Total- 100%**

## **Grade Scale**

93-100=A

90-92 = A-

87-89 = B+

83-86= B

80-82= B-

77-79= C+

73-76= C

70-72= C-

67-69= D+

63-66= D

60-62= D-

59 or Less= F

## **Academic Misconduct and Student Conduct Code**

All students must practice academic honesty. Academic misconduct is subject to an academic penalty by the course instructor and/or disciplinary sanctions by the University. All students need to be familiar with the [Student Conduct Code](#). The code is available online at

## **Disability Services for Students**

The University of Montana assures equal access to instruction through collaboration between students with disabilities, instructors, and Disability Services for Students. If you think you may have a disability adversely affecting your academic performance, and you have not already registered with Disability Services, please contact [Disability Services](#) in Lommasson Center 154 or 406.243.2243.

## **Email**

I will usually respond to emails within 24 hours from Monday-Friday. During the weekend I will respond within 48 hours. Please feel free to contact me by email with your questions or concerns.

## **Late Assignments and Makeup Exams/Quizzes**

Late work will not be accepted in this class. A missed exam or quiz can only be taken at a later date with a written excuse from a doctor, coach, dean, etc. If given, the makeup exam/quiz will be significantly different from the original exam presented in class.

## **Extra Credit**

Students can receive 5 points of extra credit over the course of the semester. I will post extra credit opportunities throughout the semester which will require students to write a 1-2 page response paper about an article or short video.

## Course Outline

### Week 1- (Aug. 30-Sept. 5)-Course Overview and Introduction to Mass Incarceration

**Read for Week 1:** Kilgore Introduction- (1-8) and Chapter 1- A Snapshot of the System (11-23), Davis Chapter 1- Introduction- Prison Reform or Prison Abolition (9-21), The *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, The *United States Bill of Rights*, The Black Radical Congress's *Freedom Agenda*. **\*See Moodle**

**Lecture:** Introduce Course and Review Syllabus

**Discussion:** What is mass incarceration? How did it develop? Why are you interested in this issue?

**Lecture:** An Overview of Mass Incarceration and Some Key Concepts

**Discussion:** How does the concept of human rights apply to people of African descent? How have settler colonialism, racism and capitalism impacted the development of prisons and policing in the United States?

**Read for Week 2:** Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz *Loaded*- Introduction (11-28), Chapter 1- Historical Context of the Second Amendment (29-40), Chapter 2- Savage War (41-58) and Chapter 3- Slave Patrols (59-72)\* **See Moodle**

### Week 2- (Sept. 6-12)-Settler Colonialism, Chattel Slavery and Mechanisms of Control

**Lecture:** Settler Colonialism, Slavery and the Development of Racism in the U.S.

**Discussion:** What does Ortiz say about the true purpose of the second amendment? What role does the second amendment play in the expansion of settler-colonialism?

**Lecture:** Slave Codes and Slave Patrols

**Discussion:** In what ways did slave codes attempt to dehumanize people of African descent? Why was this dehumanization process important to the settler colonial project and how did Africans resist?

**(\*Extra Credit Opportunity\*):** *Empire Files: Why America? Mass Shootings and White Nationalism Share Roots*

**Read for Week 3:** Angela Davis Chapter 2- Slavery, Civil Rights, and Abolitionist Perspectives Towards Prison (22-39), Davis Chapter 3- Imprisonment and Reform (40-59) and

Gary Potter, "The History of Policing in the United States." **Potter available on Moodle.**

### **Week 3- (Sept. 13-19)-The Development of Prisons and Policing in the North**

#### **Discussion Board #1 Open**

**Lecture:** The First Police in the North

**Discussion:** What role did police play in the Northern United States and how did this differ from the slave patrols of the South?

**Lecture:** The Quaker and Auburn Systems of Penitentiaries

**Discussion:** Why was the penitentiary system viewed as a progressive reform? How were the Quaker and Auburn systems different?

**Read for Week 4:** Taylor- Introduction- Black Awakening in Obama's America

### **Week 4- (Sept. 20-26)-Convict Leasing and the Jim Crow South**

**Response Paper #1 Due** Monday, Sept. 20

**Quiz # 2-**Open 8am Thursday, Sept. 23 and Due Saturday, Sept. 25 by 11:59 P.M.

**Lecture:** The 13th Amendment, Convict Leasing and the Jim Crow South

**Discussion:** How did white supremacy attempt to re-establish itself after the end of the Civil War and the Reconstruction era?

**Film:** *Slavery by Another Name: The Re-Enslavement of Black Americans from the Civil War to World War II*

**Read for Week 5:** Ward Churchill, "The Pinkerton Detective Agency: Prefiguring the FBI." **See Moodle**

### **Week 5- (Sept 27-Oct. 3)-Labor Organizing and Prohibition**

**Final Project Topic Due Monday, Sept 27.**

**Discussion Board #2 Opens**

**Lecture:** Labor Organizing and Repression

**Discussion:** In what ways was labor organizing criminalized in the late 19th and early 20th century? What role did the Pinkerton Agency play in repressing labor organizing?

**Lecture:** The Prohibition of Alcohol and the Racialization of Early Drug Prohibition

**Discussion:** Was the prohibition of alcohol successful? What role did race play in the early efforts to criminalize drugs in the United States?

**Read for Week 6:** Taylor Chapter 1- A Culture of Racism, Kilgore Chapter 2- Building Popular Support for Growing the Prison System (25-37)

### **Week 6- (Oct. 4-10)-America's Second Reconstruction and the "Law and Order" Response**

#### **Response Paper #2 Due Monday, Oct. 4**

**Lecture:** America's Second Reconstruction

**Discussion:** What fundamental changes took place during the 1960s? What were some of the social movements that lead the way for these changes in society?

**Lecture:** The "Law and Order" Response

**Discussion:** Why was a "law and order" response necessary for the maintenance of the status quo? Was it necessary for the preservation of the U.S. as a nation or could there have been alternative responses to social movements?

**Read for Week 7:** Taylor Chapter 2- "From Civil Rights to Colorblind" and Branko Marcetic, "The FBI's Secret War." **\*See Moodle**

### **Week 7- (Oct. 11-17)-COINTELPRO and Political Prisoners**

#### **Discussion Board #3 Opens**

**Lecture:** The COINTELPRO and Political Prisoners in the U.S.

**Discussion:** What was the COINTELPRO and do political prisoners exist in the United States today?

**(\*Extra Credit Opportunity\*):** *Cointelpro 101*



**Read for Week 8:** Kilgore Chapter 3- “Lock ‘Em Up and Throw Away the Key”: The Rise of Mass Incarceration (39-55) and Chapter 4- The War on Drugs (59-71) and Taylor Chapter 3- “Black Faces in High Places.”

### **Week 8- (Oct. 18-24)-From the War on Poverty to the War on Drugs**

#### **Response Paper #3 Due Monday, Oct. 18**

**Lecture:** The War on Poverty and the Social Climate of the 1960s

**Discussion:** Can poverty be eradicated in a capitalist society? How has poverty in the United States been racialized?

**Lecture:** From the War on Crime to the War on Drugs

**Discussion:** Why was there a shift to focusing on drugs instead of poverty? Were the reasons political? Why or why not?

**Lecture:** The War on Drugs Part II

**Discussion:** Has “War on Drugs” legislation been beneficial and effective over the past forty years? What are some of the racist stereotypes that helped fuel the war on drugs?

#### **Exam #1**

**Read for Week 9:** Davis Chapter 5- The Prison Industrial Complex (84-104) and Kilgore Chapter 11- Private Prisons (167- 181), Kilgore Chapter 7- Jail- The Local Face of Mass Incarceration (105-117), Kilgore Chapter 12- Incarceration Inc. (183-196)

### **Week 9- (Oct. 25-31)-The Prison Industrial Complex and Mass Incarceration**

#### **Discussion Board #4 Opens**

**Lecture:** The Development of Mass Incarceration as a Mode of Social Control

**Discussion:** What factors led to the development of mass incarceration? Why did it develop at this time?

**Lecture:** The Profit Motive and the Expansion of Prisons

**Discussion:** Why is the prison-industrial complex? Should it be legal for people and corporations to make a profit off of prisons/prisoners? Why or why not?

**Read for Week 1:** Kilgore Chapter 8- The School-to-Prison Pipeline (119-133), Taylor Chapter 4 “The Double Standard of Justice” and Heather Ann Thompson “Criminalizing Kids: The Overlooked Reason for Failing Schools” **\*See Moodle**

## **Week 10- (Nov. 1-7)-The School-to-Prison Pipeline**

### **Response Paper #4 Due**

**Lecture:** Zero Tolerance Policies and the School-to-Prison Pipeline

**Discussion:** How does race and class affect the school-to-prison pipeline?

**Read for Week 11:** Malcolm X Grassroots Movement, “Operation Ghetto Storm,” Pages 1-30 **See Moodle** and Taylor Chapter 5 “Barack Obama: The End of an Illusion” and 6 “Black Lives Matter: A Movement, Not a Moment.”.

## **Week 11- (Nov. 8-14)-Racial Profiling and Extrajudicial Killings**

### **Discussion Board #5 Opens**

**Lecture:** Racial Profiling and Extrajudicial Killings

**Discussion:** Does racial profiling violate people's human rights? What are extrajudicial killings?

**Lecture:** Stop-and-Frisk and Broken Windows Policies

**Discussion:** Should law enforcement officers target specific groups?

**Read for Week 12:** Davis Chapter 4- How Gender Structures the Prison System (60- 83),

Kilgore Chapter 10- Women’s Prisons (153-164), Kilgore Chapter 9- The Folks Left Behind (137-151)

## **Week 12- (Nov. 15-21)-Human Rights, Gender and Conditions in Prison**

### **Response Paper #5 Due**

### **Quiz #2**

**Lecture:** Human Rights and Prisoners

**Discussion:** Do prisoners deserve the same human rights as everyone else? In what ways are their human rights violated? Are prisoners treated like enslaved Africans?

**Lecture:** How Gender Shapes U.S. Prisons

**Discussion:** What are some of the specific ways that women and trans people suffer under the current prison system?

**Lecture:** The Impact of the War on Drugs on the Black Community.

**Discussion:** What have been some of the long term implications of drugs and the war on drugs in the Black community?

**Read for Week 14:** Kilgore Chapter 5- The War on Immigrants (73-89), Kilgore Chapter 6- The Death of Rehabilitation (91-103)

**Week 13- (Nov. 22-28) Thanksgiving Break**

**Work on Final Project/Extra Credit Opportunity**

**Week 14- (Nov. 29-Dec. 5)-Immigration Detention Centers and the PIC Part II**

**Lecture:** From Private Prisons to Immigrant Detention Centers

**Discussion:** Are both profit and white supremacy pushing the growth of the prison industry?

**Lecture:** Is the Concept of Rehabilitation Dead?

**Discussion:** Should prisons focus on rehabilitation? Should rehabilitation take place outside of prisons?

**Documentary:** *Inside America's For-Profit Bail System*

**Read for Week 15:** Taylor Chapter 7- From #BlackLivesMatter to Black Liberation, Davis Chapter 6- Abolitionist Alternatives (105-115), Kilgore Chapter 13- Changing the Mindset (199-217) and Chapter 14- Organizing to End Mass Incarceration (219-234) and BLM "End the War on Black Communities."

**Week 15- (Dec. 6-12)-Alternatives to Mass Incarceration**

**Lecture:** Prison Abolition and Alternatives to Prisons

**Discussion:** Should we abolish prisons in the U.S.? How would we go about abolishing prisons? What would we do with a person who commits a crime?

**Lecture:** Organizations Working to End Mass Incarceration

**Discussion:** What are some of the most effective ways to end mass incarceration?

***Exam #2***

**Week 17- (Dec. 13-17) Finals Week**

**\*\*\*The final project will be due on the day of the final\*\*\***